



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 6

1445 ROSS AVENUE, SUITE 1200

DALLAS, TX 75202-2733

NOV 08 2010

Colonel Edward R. Fleming
District Commander
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Post Office Box 60267
New Orleans, Louisiana 70160-0267

Dear Colonel Fleming:

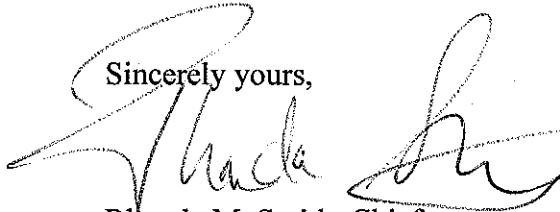
In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 has reviewed the Corps of Engineers (Corps) October 2010, Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statements (SEISs) for the following Louisiana Coastal Area (LCA) projects: Small Diversion at Convent/Blind River; Convey Atchafalaya River Water to Northern Terrebonne Marshes and Multipurpose Operation of Houma Navigation Lock; Medium Diversion at White Ditch; Amite River Diversion Canal Modification; and Terrebonne Basin Barrier Shoreline Restoration. EPA now offers comments and recommendations on these Final SEISs to help the Corps develop and implement the most effective restoration strategies for coastal Louisiana.

EPA's July 2010 comments on the Draft SEIS expressed support of the LCA program as an important step towards greater efforts to restore some semblance of sustainability to parts of coastal Louisiana. EPA reiterates that the LCA program in general and these projects in particular should not be mistaken for the larger and more comprehensive effort needed to address coastal wetland loss in Louisiana on the scale and scope warranted. These and other LCA projects under development can be viewed as important stepping stones towards larger and more aggressive projects, and offer valuable learning and adaptive management opportunities that will help in that regard.

EPA continues to believe that of the LCA projects discussed herein, the White Ditch diversion offers the greatest promise for coastal restoration benefits and advancing large-scale projects. EPA urges the Corps to continue working to ensure that this proposed project is as effective as possible. Specifically, we ask the Corps to continue efforts to assess the suspended sediment concentrations in the river in the vicinity of the proposed project, and to make any design and/or location changes necessary to optimize sediment delivery via the diversion. EPA reiterates that, given the relatively high cost to environmental benefit ratio, the agency does not place a high priority on implementation of the Atchafalaya River conveyance project relative to other LCA restoration projects such as White Ditch. Moreover, while the Atchafalaya River conveyance project could help reduce ecosystem degradation, additional ecosystem restoration measures would be needed to more fully address wetland loss in the study area.

This completes our comments on the aforementioned Final SEIS. EPA finds that the Final SEIS adequately addressed our comments offered on the Draft SEIS. Again, we thank you for your continued collaboration with EPA on this effort. EPA looks forward to continued cooperation working toward advancement of these and other important LCA projects and studies. If you have any questions about the 309 Review Process, please contact Michael Jansky, of my staff, at (214) 665-7451 or by e-mail at jansky.michael@epa.gov. If you wish to discuss technical aspects of our comments, please contact John Ettinger at (504) 862-1119 or by e-mail at ettinger.john@epa.gov.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rhonda M. Smith', is written over the typed name and title.

Rhonda M. Smith, Chief
Office of Planning and
Coordination 6ENXP

cc: USFWS, Lafayette, LA
NMFS, Baton Rouge, LA
OCPR, Baton Rouge, LA